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October 2007

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Module 5

College Student Research Findings

Introduction

What is the level of college student performance on Piagetian tasks? You may not have noticed any of the investigations into the reasoning patterns of college students. These investigations tend to support what you have already discovered in this workshop.

College students do not consistently use formal schemes on a variety of tasks. In fact, a most common feature of the reasoning of college students is its variability. The context, setting, and details of a problem seem to have a large influence on how students attack a problem. The profound, universal, unifying concept, so obvious to a professor who writes the problem or question for the student, is often a hidden mystery to the student.

Objective

To present some recent data on the responses of college students to various Piagetian tasks.

Procedure

Participate in a discussion of the results shown in this module.

Results

The original idea of Piaget about stages of development suggests strong, consistent performance. This has not been found for college students and adults. Martorano (Dev. Psych. 1977, pp. 666-672) administered 10 traditional formal operations tasks and found that the percentage of students displaying formal operations depended on which task you looked at, ranging from 0% to 60% in sixth graders and from 15% to 95% in twelfth graders. The widely cited 50% figure for college students is thus highly misleading.

In addition to giving a list of recent Piagetian articles on the back on this page, we have attached a report of large N investigations we performed in the 1970's.

Question

1) What do you think are the implications of these studies for your work as a teacher of college students?